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Evangelical Advocacy: A Response to Global Poverty

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David A. Robb's Advocacy Part III: "The Christian Witness to the State" Identity as Advocates

Christian Witness to the State

If we return to the definition of advocacy from this series that, among all the concepts, certain ones are central identification of injustice; speaking against this injustice; speaking to those who, in one way or another, are helping about the injustice; there is a speaking identification of the goal of the speaking is about

In this section I would like to begin to explore what it be done "Christianly" title of this series suggests that I would like to draw on John Howard Yoder's Witness to the State (TCWTS) and examine how Yoder addressed the concept want to be clear that in Yoder's view a "final" or "ultimate" understanding of how followers of Jesus should engage did not use the concept of "advocacy," Yoder's work is limited comments to the particular issue of the state and approach to extend the discussion of the principles and practices Christianly beyond the state in future parts of this series

Despite these caveats I believe that Yoder provides a Christians might engage in advocacy Tasking us to explore various points in more detail later value of and limits to which we should therefore like to briefly explore concerning injustice speaking to the state speaking to the church and we should note that Yoder did not take up with and by" and, at least for this section we are going

about advocacy that is for" those who are suffering from injustice. That his ideas could be expanded to include advocacy for the oppressed is not in doubt but I will not deal with that here.

Yoder is clear at the very beginning of the book (see TCWTS, 1:1) that it was written in 1964. Anabaptist (Mennonite to be precise) and, thanks in large part to the writing of Reinhold Niebuhr, a pacifist engagement with the state is a major contribution to social or correcting public policy. Yoder put it this way (numbers in parentheses from here on refer to pages in TCWTS): "The interpretation of this problem in contemporary American history is that a consistent Christian pacifist must accept the verdict of the state's position." (and in the footnote following that line add the following: "a convincing formulation of the current interpretation can be found in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr.") (7)

Yoder used TCWTS as an argument against this formulation of the project this way:

Our purpose is to analyze whether it is primarily the case that the position rooted not in pragmatic or psychological but in theological considerations is thereby irrelevant to the social order. Our attempt to ascertain on what grounds, according to the Christian tradition, what hope of success is nevertheless not only possible but necessary. The Christian should witness to the social order in the world.

I do not think it is necessary to accept Yoder's pacifist arguments and benefit from them. It is also attempted to say that if a pacifist Mennonite can make the statement above, it is worth examining his arguments because he clearly is (intellectually and theologically) a serious thinker. Since he was from within the Anabaptist tradition, Yoder could not be (largely Mennonite) readers would agree that Christian

social order. He was writing from within a tradition that questioned both the validity and necessity of doing so. (see Joire's good historical overview)

In the midst of these questions and pressures, Yoder asks the Christian can and should witness to this witness be done in a way that allowed the church to be the church. One way of reading his book is as a treatise on ecclesiology of the state, a kind of "checkbook of the centuries old conflict" (Yoder) about the role of the church with an articulation of the church can engage the state on the basis of the church's

With this background, let us turn to Yoder's key proposal in relation to the themes outlined above.

Injustice/Justice: An Eschatological Vision of the Kingdom

Yoder begins his discussion of witness with a section on witness to the state and ends with a discussion of "Christian Lordship." The section deals with the challenge of the already-embodied Christ's reign embodied in the resurrection and its meaning over the "powers" (more on this in a moment). The actual workings of the fallen and rebellious powers point to the resurrection as the basis for the church's work in the world. "The church points forward as to the future of its own redemptive work of God's (10) Christ's "lordship" not ascribed status (dependent on "believers" claiming him) but considers a distortion of the biblical meaning of a just, rational

He goes on to explore the meaning of this status in relation to the cross and underlines the fact that the church embodies both "an triumph on the cross and a foretaste of His ultimate lordship"

Speaking: Witness to the Kingdom

It should already be clear that Yoder holds a central place of the church in God's plan. It is not more difficult to not bring it into every element of Yoder's work. In a section of the book on "the form of the church's witness," he states that the church's witness to the state is grounded in its very existence as a "society" that follows the command of love. This is before a word is uttered the church is speaking through its life is grounded in repeated acts of love. Yoder sees this in decision making structures within the church undermining admonition leads to accountability and decision making models open and transparent. Clearly many congregations do not live these ideals but to the extent that they do their commitment about how things could be done differently.

In addition to these community practices that are needed in a decision making body, Yoder points to the "concretization" of the vision of the church as critical. He states that followers of Jesus live just like everyone else the church has a presence in the world. In this sense the church provides a model for living that is accomplished. All of this, again, is based on the living risen Christ.

Beyond these points Yoder lays out three criteria that should guide the verbal witness of the church. He quotes him at length as to provide a critical way of thinking about the church's witness in this way:

Even when we move beyond the implicit witness which is the example of the church, by her own inner life and her own words, we come to speak of particular concerns and criticisms. This approach starts with the church's own experience in

would present the most straightforward way to engage question concerns whether this way of being and speaking world. This question is born out of a deep (isn't it?) sense about whether the church is really like the assumes that God has provided what the church needs purpose of writing this series is to challenge the church in the world that God has gifted the church with a variety God's Holy Spirit to lead it into truth provides a foundation and speaking in the way Yoder suggests.

Yoder does link the church with the state to the speaking to the individual statesperson and makes it of witness as a genuine challenge. A important point for who tend to divide the church from "the world" is that for Yoder this distinction is meaningless and his explanation of the gospel demonstrates that witness to the statesperson is, indeed, not a discipline. The use of these terms in the Gospels, "...it is clear that world has to do with the reign of God among men in all relations, and not solely with the forgiveness of sins individuals." (23)

Further, and this is critical to his overall argument of goes on to say "On whatever level we find a man in the we ask of him is that he accept the gospel. What we be gospel by virtue of the fact that we relate it to his (25) Here Yoder is laying out a key understanding of the follower of Jesus addresses her as a person who is a person of concern meeting that person where she is and, as Yoder language that she will state below that Yoder argues witness is often a corrective action we ask the states clear throughout that the correction should be based on statesperson has already stated. As Yoder reminds us, this witness not cease to be gospel because it challenges the state. "available as a form of witness we are calling upon to take a step of faith based on where she is at the point

These points provide a core understanding, I believe, look like for the Advocacy. is done based on what the church and flows from that engagement with the Holy Spirit's work the witness is what draws the statesperson to repentance live up to his own commitments that are consistent with the reign of God, and, ultimately, towards discipleship.

Powers: The Identity of the State

While the state is only one "power" to whom we might (advocacy efforts), it is the one with which we must understand the sense in which the state (or the corporate church itself) is a "power" in a biblical sense will require will undertake that in a state's political concepts of "principalities and powers" is very important for our work exactly with "whom" and "what" we are dealing in a more modern sense. to provide a review of Yoder's work is in God's economy as introduced in TCWTS are developed at least two other works: *Discipleship in a Non-Conforming Politics* of which the essence is provided here.

Yoder argues according to the early church and the apostles are "the bearers of political authority" and "are in special divine economy, being used whether in rebellion or submission" (1.2). As implied above, Yoder argues that the church is not the state but rather that the state makes its political work to be carried out on earth through the people who explore later how this is a more developed view of the state compared to other Christian traditions but Yoder's high ecclesiology that the state not be elevated to a place in which it is "meaning of history's" view of the state is that it has an "essential" God's plan but that this task is distinct from the church's.

Obviously this will influence the way in which the church while it might seem that this vision would lead to pack the church, Yoder develops the idea that witness, because statespeople must be done with "an awareness of our of this statesman(24). The point here is that the church, to the state is merely calling the state to Obey what God this implies that the church understands what this role describes elsewhere that "the state exists for the purpose "The more a state aspires to a religious mission, and seeks to control world history... the more the Christian will respect to the state." (Medals, 2003: 45) edges in the same thatThe New Testament does not deal with the state in school systems, building roads, administering social services, and all the other things that we also think of state.Yoder (2003: 19)

None of this implies that the church should not speak but it should provide a word of caution to those Christians should or should not provide certain services and actions. would seem to imply is that while Christians are free array of issues it should be careful about what, we will examine how different Christians have to put their own "theologies of the state" over the temporal. to acknowledge state does have a role in keeping evil at bay while religion church can challenge the state (via justice based on) its own commitments (The Sabbath) a view of the state's role carefully circumscribed conflated with the church's own mean that the church will speak to the state only about example. Rather it means that the church will approach understanding that the state is not the "savior" of humankind role to play in ensuring that God's plan of redemption state fails and has proclivities to overstep its bounds must also be willing to call the state to "repent" of its worship. The state would like us to believe that it is independent human thing but we understand (according to Yoder) that a role to play in what God is about in the world, that

specifically, that its role is not to bring about redemption for humanity.

Speakers: Church's Identity ("Polis" in Solidarity)

Yoder had a strong conviction of the central role of the church in the redemptive process. This is brought into even greater relief when we consider the attendant view of the state in his work (Body politics : five practices of the Christian community in the world). Yoder develops further his views of the church in this work, and it is here we draw an initial analysis of the church's identity. Yoder notes in the introduction:

The Christian community, like any community held together by a common faith, to important sociopolitical reality, the church has the character of a polis (the Greek word for people with political organization), namely, a structured social body. (Yoder 2001: viii)

He goes on to define further the identity of this community:

Stated very formally, the pattern we shall discover in the history of human socialness is prefigured by the shape to which Christ is called. Church and world are not two compartments of reality, nor legislation or two institutions with contradictory aims, but two aspects of the pertinence of the Temple of God. It is called to be holy, and today what the world is called to be (Yoder 2001: ix).

There is no "hubris" in this reality as some might think. It merely acknowledges that the role of the church is to be a witness to the world.

reconciliation and redemption that such plans can be carried out in humility and Yoder, in exegeting the TCWTS, concludes that the "beast" is a political figure a church that relates to the state in an "idolatrous" and that Yoder insists on this central role for the church of the seriousness with which it is entrusted to live in reminder that its speaking - it was for its own tasks embodying the reign of God.

Scripture provides some helpful imagery concerning the which would appear to be directly opposite of witness or a (this section adapted from Davis 2009) the two extremely images of the identity of the follower of Jesus. One of the same coin constitute our identity: in

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were are the people of God; once you had not received mercy. Dear friends, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against citations here and the of from the New American Standard Translation (emphasis added)

The writer to the Hebrews uses the same language and ancestors in Chapter 11 explicitly in terms of their "a element to this in Corinthians 5 stating that we are reconciliation ambassadors of Christ. The verb he uses: p ambassador) means to be elder or first in rank. In ambassador was someone whose represents the nation. This ambassadorship moves far beyond merely seeking human and God. This is made clear in how Paul describes project in Christ in Colossians 1:13

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred

kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of Him all things were created, both the things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all these have been created through Him and for Him. He is the firstborn of Him all things hold together. He is also the firstborn of the dead, so that He has the first place in everything. For it was the Father's will that the fullness should dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by the blood of His cross; through Him we have redemption.

This identity places the follower of Christ in a critical position as an ambassador of a sovereign carrying out the sovereign's wishes in the nations of this world in which the passage indicates that God's reconciliation project is the unwinding of the restoration of the world to a state of peace with God.

French sociologist Jacques Ellul (whose work we will discuss later) provides a useful summary of this dual identity and, in the process, shows how the Christian's solidarity with the world is both a rationale for engaging in advocacy and how we

The first condition of the Christian is a well known one: she is sufficiently understood in its totality by the world. She is in the world, she has a social life. She is a citizen of the world, she has a place in a family, she has a job and must work to earn her life according to the same rules as other men and women. She is of the same natural state and lives in the same conditions as they do in the world she must do seriously, because she is responsible to others and cannot neglect the responsibilities of a citizen. Like all the others, she is a citizen of the world. But, on the other hand, she cannot be totally of the world. This world is only ever a provisional tent (2 Corinthians 5:1) is an alien and a traveler (Hebrews 11:13). This is the Christian's situation even if it is extremely painful. She belongs to another city. Her family tree (her identity) is elsewhere and

from outside. She has another lord... She is an ambassador
 earth, which is to say that she must represent that the
 establishes a relationship between the two, BUT she
 on the interests of this world: she defends the interests
 ambassador who represents and defends the interests
 46, author translation)

Thus even as the Polish members' solidarity with other
 provides a strong rationale for walking with and speaking
 understand their plight because it is our own. And yet
 use our understanding of the human plight to speak another
 way. We represent the desires of our sovereign. We of
 our residence but we dare not defend (or uncritically
 policies) instead we speak to the powers of the countries
 perspective of our sovereign. Space does not permit a
 implications of our alienness but that piece of our identity
 issue of solidarity with the suffering of the human condition
 stateless people of our world.

Change: Ideal Society or Narrow "Correctives"

Any advocacy work, as we have seen, is political, and the
 attitude that reduces injustice and allows the church to flourish
 what is the nature of the change we are requesting with
 statespersons in this area that Yoder has some very useful
 church especially the "empowered" church of the global
 privileged existence that assumes we will be able to
 later section the limits of advocacy and the extent to
 has gone far in trusting its ability to influence change with
 an analysis of James Davison Hunter's world: the irony
 and possibility of Christianity in the late modern world
 out a generation concerning the change we seek by quoting

Since we cannot say that God has any "proper" pattern of Christian witness to the state with unbelief should be a Christian witness to the state with a pattern of ideal society, a proper society in a fallen world is by the Christian's proposal of how to describe, and then to seek to create the ideal state can best fulfill its responsibilities in a fallen world.

The Christian witness will therefore express itself in criticisms, addressed to given injustices in a particular and specific suggestions for improvements to remedy abuses. This does not mean that if the criticisms were heeded, suggestions put into practice, the Christian would have a more demanding set of criticisms to make. There would be no attainment to which a Christian could say, "This is the Christian's goal"; the Christian would have nothing more to ask; such an ideal level is the kingdom of God. (32 added)

Throughout his book Yoder uses the idea of the church as a way and its work is actually an ongoing self-critique as "critical witness" (36) is consistent with the idea that it does not seek to "cover the field" in its witness but rather to witness to which it has a claim.

And what of "results" of "impracticable" witness? These points are the final part of this series in examining the role of the church in our advocacy. For Yoder, the results of our witness are

(W)e cannot calculate how obedience and success are measured in the long run the right way is to see the most of it measured by its conformity to the command and to the results by its success in specific results. (44)

While such a view may seem unacceptable to those with a "results oriented" world, there is much wisdom in this greater detail in the final part of this series.

Summing Up

John Howard Yoder has laid out some important principle guideposts for the way followers of Jesus think. First, the source of our speaking is grounded in an understanding of the world (an eschatology) and our identity in Christ's community. This recognizes the important role that the church plays in society, a political reality. However, the church is in solidarity with the world because it is a member of the world. Second, to the extent that the church faithfully lives its vision in its communal life it will identify ways in which it speaks up to its (the state's) authority. At such times it speaks in a corrective to the state not in hopes of installing an ideal society but because the state will change. In speaking it addresses the state as a person who understands and calling him to make his own choice. Such a call, to the extent that it is consistent with God's plan, acts as a call to take a step of faith for the state itself because it recognizes that God is at work to accomplish God's purposes and that the state's role is not determinant or "essential" (in the flow of history).

Advocacy to the state requires the church to live faithfully and to speak out of a lived experience of humility and love for the state as a person and a desire to see her live righteously. To take a step of faith to make changes that will enable justice. In this sense advocacy is a modeling of the behavior of the disciples to in Luke 22:

And there arose also a dispute among them as to who should be regarded to be greater. He said to them, "The kings of the earth lord it over them; but among you it shall not be so. But it is not this way with you, but the one who is first must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant."

Yoder provides much useful counsel in his point later section that discusses a "model of justice in state but to any society feel that these points do not help us to how to conduct advocacy and power, my experience has shown me that it is relatively rare advocacy to step back and consider things like a) the of justice the ultimate ends to which they advocate and practice as followers of Jesus and its relation to role of the state in God's plan; d) how advocacy effort "good news of the Kingdom" that this section identifies issues for the Christian advocate to consider. In disagreement with Yoder's conviction that the advocate should be to at least attempt to lay out informed judgments of these issues.

With this background in place I would like to go back to explore some of the main issues that I would like to take excursions into the themes of

- "principalities and powers" and what it means (and other institutions) to act as "fallen powers"
- the church and the state in various traditions and discussion of "witness"
- the need to go beyond witness to the state and the corporation as a power
- the reality of structural sin in light of the concept "power of hope"
- what it means to use the language of leadership as witness (a return to Yoder and the concept of "non-violence")

before returning to a succinct description of advocacy specifically

0. what the church is **not** willing: "symbolic acts and to
as a model of **faith** in advocacy
0. assessing advocacy **with** might think about chang